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## Maximizing the Potential of Black Greek-Letter Organizations: Getting Back to the Basics

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## **Maximizing the Potential of Black Greek-Letter Organizations: Getting Back to the Basics**

### **Abstract**

*This workshop examines: 1) the history behind the origin of Black Greek-letter organizations; 2) their special role on campus and in the community; 3) the reasons why people join and myths about membership; 4) current concerns and problems; and 5) keys for getting back to the basics.*

### **John Leonard Harris**

Founder and Principal Consultant, Harris Consulting Services

Since their inception in the early 1900s, Black Greek-letter organizations have had at the forefront of their agenda, the state of the Black community. These organizations have continually worked to develop literacy programs, establish scholarships, and coordinate voter registration drives all to uplift and advance progress for Blacks. Clearly, Black Greek-letter organizations have been a significant part of Black culture and have helped to shape the Black Experience.

Members of these organizations have represented some of the best and brightest students on their respective college and university campuses. Many from these great organizations have gone to become renown political leaders (A. Phillip Randolph, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Reverend Jesse Jackson); governors and mayors (Andrew Young, Douglas Wilder, Tom Bradley, Harold Washington); college and university presidents (Dr. Johnetta Cole, Spelman College, Dr. Henry Ponder, Fisk University); scientist, scholars and poets (George Washington Carver, Alain Leroy Locke, James Weldon Johnson); celebrities (Lena Horne, Bill Cosby, Dionne Warwick, Maya Angelou); and superstar athletes (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Michael Jordan, Karl Malone, Jerry Rice, Emmitt Smith) just to name a few.

More recently, it appears that Black Greek-letter organizations have strayed away from the principles that made them so vital as “survival networks” at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The growing concern regarding poor academic achievement, infighting, no community service and hazing, has only helped to fuel the fire of an already tarnished image for these organizations, particularly at many predominantly white institutions. “Getting Back to the Basics” revisits those principles that one established Black Greek-letter organizations particularly those who have been inactive, to understand the importance of their membership, as well as the need to renew their commitment. The hope is that each person will come to realize that membership in one of these organizations carries with it a responsibility to work for the betterment, not only of their own organization, but of Black people and all of humanity.

### **Presenter**

**John Leonard Harris** is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts from the University of Missouri-Columbia and his Master of Education degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has been

married to his wife, Charlene for nineteen years and they have four children. Mr. Harris is the Founder and Principal Consultant for Harris Consulting Services through which he provides cultural education, leadership, organizational effectiveness and motivational programs. He is also Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, Inc., a faith-based nonprofit organization that serve as an active agent of hope and renewal for the forgotten, undervalued, unappreciated, and disadvantaged in our society. Additionally, Mr. Harris partners with churches, community organizations and state agencies whose mission is to serve low-income families and at-risk youth. Mr. Harris is an award-winning writer and local newspaper columnist. He is a popular keynote and conference speaker. His presentation topics range from religion to rap, media to motivation, family to freedom and self-esteem to service.